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U.S. rules out revenge in slaying of Marines

By Tom Diaz
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The Reagan administration has ruled out taking retaliation on its own for the slaying of four U.S. Marines in El Salvador last month, a well-informed administration official said yesterday, but the Salvadoran government is "making progress" in identifying the gunmen who murdered them.

"We are actively working with the Salvadoran government," said the official, who spoke on condition that he not be identified. "But any action taken — judicial or otherwise, and I emphasize otherwise — would be taken by the Salvadorans, not by the United States."

The official denied rumors — circulating yesterday in Washington — that the administration was consid-

ering a plan to use U.S. force in direct retaliation for the Marines' slayings as part of a "message" to terrorists world-wide.

But he indicated that the option for direct action against terrorists is still open in countries not considered friendly to the United States.

"We are actively collaborating with the Salvadorans on the exchange of intelligence information," he said. "But we are leaving any kind of 'signals' [to the terrorists] and the administration of justice up to the Salvadorans."

The four off-duty Marines — members of the U.S. Embassy guard unit — were slain June 19 as they relaxed in civilian clothes at a sidewalk cafe. Nine other people were killed by the terrorists, including two American civilians.

The principal communist rebel

group in El Salvador — the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) — later claimed responsibility for the attack.

President Reagan vowed that the killers would be brought to justice, in an emotional speech delivered on the runway at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., during a ceremony honoring the Marines upon the return of their remains to this country.

"They say the men who murdered these sons of America disappeared into the city streets," he said. "But I pledge to you today, they will not evade justice on Earth any more than they could escape the judgment of God."

Mr. Reagan said the United States and El Salvador would "move any mountain and ford any river to find the jackals and bring them and their colleagues to justice."

He echoed that promise on Monday in his brief remarks on the release of the TWA hijack hostages, saying that "the murderers of ... our Marines and civilians in El Salvador

must be held accountable."

The official indicated that the administration may not rely on local governments to deal with terrorists when it doesn't have confidence that the local government will take effective action, implying that in such cases the administration will consider striking at terrorists directly with U.S. force.

He refused to specify what countries or what options the administration may be exploring.

He also declined to put any kind of timetable on when the Salvadoran government might take action against those who killed the marines.

"That is up to the Salvadorans and when they break the case," he said. "But they are making progress."